DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 118 904 CE 006 464

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TITLE The Images and Realities of Career Education.
PUB DATE 12 Dec 75
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at CBSA/ACSA Joint Annual Conference (San Francisco, California, December 12, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Career Education; *Educational Accountability; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; Interdisciplinary Approach; Speeches; *Student Needs; Vocational Development

ABSTRACT

It is important that career education goals and objectives be clarified and any present inaccurate images by changed. Career education can be defined as that delivery system which helps students develop the necessary competencies to function in the real-life role of producer or wage earner. Thinking in terms of competencies required to function effectively inlife roles is one way of avoiding "fuzzy" goals. Abraham Maslow talks about a hierarchy of human needs leading to self-actualizing experiences when their survival needs have been left unmet? The primary areas of accountability for the schools are related to the roles of citizen, consumer, learner, and wage earner; secondary areas include the renewing self, the physical and mental self, and the family member. Concentrating on the life role of the wage earner, career education must be an all-encompassing discipline which is not confined to single occupations or life styles. A good career education program provides options for all students, not just for the college-bound. Career education, an experiential and multi-interdisciplinary approach, helps students develop both competence and confidence. (EA)

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THE IMAGES AND REALITIES OF CAREER EDUCATION

Pictures in the Head

Career education. What is the first image that occurs to you when someone uses that term?

Walter Lippman has said that people operate on the basis of pictures in their minds, not always on the basis of "real" facts. This is probably true of most individuals; certainly many of my actions stem from mental images.

In considering career education, we need to take into account the pictures people have in their heads. Secondly, we need to determine what the image of career education should be, because it is important that there be a consensus as to what image of career education is most accurate and valuable to students. Third, if we can agree on that image, how can schooling be changed to match that image, or to produce career education which accurately reflects the desired outcomes envisioned in that image?

CBSA/ACSA Joint Annual Conference
San Francisco, California
December 12, 1975

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Let us examine some current images of career education. Depending upon orientation and background, one can summarize these images under six or seven categories. First, the general public still has what can be called the "old car" image. For many people career education is a group of boys gathered around an old car. Even many teachers have inherited this kind of image. Far too many individuals see career education as something applying primarily to boys working with their hands.

Next, many of my colleagues in education have what can be called the "dumb-smart" image. As far as they are concerned, career education is for all the "dumb kids" and so-called academic education is for all the "smart" students. Somehow we must eliminate the words "dumb" and "smart" from our educational vocabularies. Much has been discovered over the past 20 years about learning and the process of intellectual growth. Dr. Benjamin Bloom, one of the leading educational researchers in this country, recently made the following comment:

> "We have learned that individual differences in learning are differences in rates of learning, not in basic ability or capability. With appropriate teaching methods as many as 90 percent of students have learned, in time, up to the level of the top ten percent in earlier groups."

The 1973 National Teacher of the Year, Jack Ensworth of Bend, Oregon, has stated this concept in another way: "If only the beautiful birds sang, the forests would be quiet indeed."

Regardless of the research and despite our rhetoric about the uniqueness of each individual, many people still advocate that "academic" means advanced and is for the "smart" students and that career education is for the "dumb" students.

The fact is that only a fraction of the occupations in our economy require a collegiate bachelor's degree for entry yet much of the secondary school curriculum is preparatory for college entry. Most American high schools have been geared to fill the needs of students intending to enroll in institutions of higher education, which is to say, about 20 percent of the student body.

Here is an interesting illustration of what has happened: About twice as many jobs require welding as a background skill and experience as jobs which need chemistry. Yet, nearly every high school has a chemistry laboratory and chemistry courses, while very few high schools have welding labs or offer welding courses. Why? Many school boards and school administrators indicate they can't afford a welding lab, but they can afford a chemistry lab which does not have the potential of serving nearly as many students as the welding lab might. Their mental block may be that "dumb-smart" image.

Public education will not be serving most of our students' needs until educators and parents change those unreal images in their minds. Career education is for all students--slow learners and fast learners--and includes all occupations, not just some of them. A brain surgeon has a career which requires career education; so does an auto mechanic.

A third fallacious image of career education can be called the "footstool and end table image." Have we made enough end tables and footstools in our school woodworking shops for a spell? If there is any single great weakness in the career education movement it is in the middle grades, serving students in grades seven through ten. Homemaking teachers and

industrial arts teachers must be challenged to lead the way in devising ways for boys and girls to explore all career families or clusters of occupations in the laboratories, in the subject matter classrooms, and in the communities. If we define career education as "fooling around" in the shop, making another unwanted footstool, we have missed the mark.

Another image can be called the "playtime" image. This writer recently visited the classroom of a second grade teacher who was proud of the work that she had been doing in "career education." The students had spent much of the school year building a scale model barn. Although it may have provided a certain amount of learning experience, the school's principal described the project as a disorganized game. He said that the students had enjoyed the project, but tests revealed they had not improved their skills in reading, writing, or computing. They probably didn't learn very much about farming as a career, either. At this point, one can only recall the misunderstandings and misapplication of the theories of John Dewey and other "progressive" educators. If we allow career education to become another form of recess, it will evaporate as have some other fine notions in education. Career education should bring more meaning to the curriculum, not less. A barn-building project could be used to improve basic skills while at the same time informing youngsters about some of the careers associated with agriculture, for example.

Principals, like other people, often operate on the basis of pictures in their heads; and their images of career education are no exception. Some administrators have developed what might be called the "dumping ground" image. This is closely related to the "dumb-smart" image. Some

high schools, in effect, retitle the woodworking shop classes; they call them Dumping Ground I for the sophomores, Dumping Ground II for the juniors, and Dumping Ground III for the seniors. In other words, the wood shop often becomes a place where students are dumped when school counselors and administrators do not know what else to do with them. Often, the vocational educator is good at handling students with behavioral problems and so that is where the behavioral problems are dumped. An obvious question must be asked: How many of the behavioral problems are created because the student sees no purpose, no meaning, to his so-called academic classes? Does that student see a relationship between what he or she needs to meet the challenges of real life and his or her schooling experiences?

Certain legislators have another image of career education. This is the "we can't afford it" image. In a recent legislative hearing an Oregon state senator, who also happens to be a teacher in a junior high school, began to talk about the cost of career education. Leaning back in his chair he said, "We can't afford career education. Why, did you know that you could build 14 or 15 regular high schools for what it costs to build one vocational high school?"

This image in the mind errs in two ways. First, career education happens best in the regular school program. The separate vocational high school limits the notion of career education to specific job training for certain jobs. In contrast, career education in a regular high school can be infused throughout the entire school program. Secondly, the senator's cost estimate is only an image in his head. A vocational high school such as he envisions would have gold plated doorknobs and marble halls.

True, some specific job training classrooms do cost more money than an English classroom, but most of them do not cost more. As an example, speech is one of the communication skills required for many careers; e.g., policemen, nurses, salesmen and saleswomen, teachers, ministers. Yet, the speech class is not viewed as a part of the career education program in most schools. Plainly, the erroneous image in the head must be replaced with a more accurate picture of what career education really is about.

A New Image

What is the correct image of career education and how can present inaccurate images be changed? Probably the place to start is with the U.S. Office of Education. Assistant Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Sidney Marland, much to his credit, has led the national drive on behalf of career education over the past few years. Now is the time for Secretary Marland to take the next step: marshal the resources to clearly define career education, establish the proper image, and then design a national strategy to replace present images with the new picture.

When the goals and objectives of any organization or enterprise are fuzzy, the actions of the organization tend to take on the same complexion. There is really nothing wrong, in a major way, with American education except fuzzy goals. Some time must be spent clarifying goals and the consequent accountability of schooling. We can't ask educators to be accountable unless we first spell out what they are to be held to account for.

Let's look at a notion or two that might bring a degree of clarity. First, let us define career education as that delivery system which helps students develop the competencies needed to function in the real-life role of producer or wage earner. The new image--and correct image in the mind--of career education should be a smiling worker with a paycheck in his hand!

Thinking in terms of the competencies required to function effectively in life roles is one way of removing the fuzziness from the goals of schooling. Schools must begin by diagnosing student needs as related to these life roles. It is the hope of this writer that every state legislature would also join in the goal-setting task. This should be the point of access for a state legislature into the teaching-learning process--determining what (not how) should be accomplished by schooling. Here are some sample goals:

(1) Individuals equipped with the skills and knowledge essential in a complex society.

(2) Lives enriched by the arts and humanities.

(3) Individuals able and willing to accept their responsibilities as citizens.

(4) Individuals qualified for entry into occupations leading to economic self-sufficiency and able to provide society with qualified manpower.

(5) The generation and dissemination of knowledge acquired by research.

(6) Individuals physically healthy to meet the demands of society.

(7) Provision for a lifetime of learning.

What skills and competencies does a person need to cope with life in the last quarter of this century? Oregon has recently revised the state's high school graduation requirements because much of the schooling experience was constructed, and requirements developed, for the society of 50 years ago. James Coleman recently pointed out that contemporary children may have outgrown present-day schools. He indicates that the information-poor but experience-rich society of 50 years ago has been replaced by the information-rich but experience-poor society of today and the schools do not reflect that change. What kind of society existed 50 years ago when most high school graduation requirements were established? Were we then killing 55,000 people a year on our freeways and highways? Did a student need to negotiate installment buying and the handling of credit cards in 1922? Did we have television 50 years ago? No. Clearly, school graduation requirements are of little value if the requirements of contemporary life are not reflected accurately. But, it all must begin with some clear signals and straightforward policy demands as to what the school system should accomplish.

Some further clues to finding answers to these questions can be obtained in the writings of Abraham Maslow. He talks about a heierarchy of human needs. Maslow indicates that the first and most fundamental need is for survival. Little can be done with a human being until a majority of the survival needs have been met. Moving in a hierarchal fashion, the second need is for security. The third need is for love and belonging. The fourth need is for self-esteem, and the fifth and final need is for self-actualization.

Although Maslow did not state that it was unimportant for a person to gain self-actualizing experiences, he did stress that in order to gain a person's attention the majority of needs must be met at each level before moving to the next level of need. Has American education been trying to provide young people with self-actualizing experiences while at the same time many of their survival needs have been left unmet? This is a serious question, deserving of much thought. Can students, given courses in Chaucer and Shakespeare, become self-actualizing when they still have survival needs? This doesn't mean that Chaucer and Shakespeare or other good literature is not important. They are. Students of all kinds, representing many cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, need the opportunity to appreciate the arts and humanities. But many survival, security, love and belonging, and self-esteem needs come first! Career education holds the potential for helping young people develop the competencies to survive. It is a form of survival education and meets a basic, primary human need.

Another dimension of the image problem rests with student needs. Too often, school boards, administrators, teachers, and even parents, use "need" as a verb when it is more significantly, in this context, used as a noun. We need more money. We need better discipline. We need more library books. But what is the real need, the noun "need." Are we meeting students at the point of the student's needs, providing what he needs in terms of where he stands on the ladder of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or are we meeting students at the point of the teacher's needs or the school's needs? This is another crucial question to ponder.

We can see seven great strands running through the school curriculum; these are the experiences related to the roles of citizen, consumer, learner,

wage earner, the renewing self, the physical and mental self, and the family member. The first four strands comprise the primary areas of accountability for the schools. The latter three are shared with the home and other agencies and represent the secondary areas of accountability for education. Schools share accountability with the home, the church, television, and other governmental agencies to help young people develop the competencies to function effectively as a family member and a self-renewing individual.

Finally, there are some things for which education should not be held accountable. One example is the area of health. This should be the area where accountability lies with the city or county health departments and state health agencies. Major health problems cannot be resolved in the schools. Other governmental agencies with responsibilities in the health field must provide health services to children as well as adults. City and county governments must be as concerned with human resources problems as they already are with streets and highways. Billions of dollars are being poured into city and county governments by Federal Revenue Sharing programs. It has been estimated that 75 percent of these funds have gone into material such as bricks, mortar, asphalt, concrete, and lumber, despite the great unmet human resource needs for which local government should be held accountable.

Progressing from human need to individual life roles enables us to focus, now, on accurate images of career education. While remembering that the six other great strands are also important, we will concentrate on the life role of the wage earner. It is my general bias that we have

shortchanged this role in determining what schooling could do to help young people develop the competencies they need to be a successful wage earner or producer in today's economy. If we accept the philosophical base that we want career education to concentrate on the life role of the wage earner, then career education must be an all-encompassing discipline which is not confined to single occupations or life styles.

Will Schooling be Different?

How will schooling change as a result of seeing career education as a primary foundation for education?

There are very few materials in elementary school libraries depicting Daddy with a blue collar and a lunch pail; most of the current elementary reading primers and pre-primers picture Daddy with a white collar. We continue to underestimate the broad range of careers and the 25,000 different occupations which exist. With the effective introduction of career education into the elementary school classroom, teachers will infuse a massive amount of examples from the world of work into their teaching. Children will learn about the value and dignity of blue collar as well as white collar jobs. Moreover, we will cease to equate career education with job training and see it as a driving force behind the curriculum.

At the junior high level, a career education program could provide the opportunity for a variety of exploratory experiences. In Oregon, we are trying to give students in grades seven through ten the chance to explore the major 15 or 16 clusters of occupations with hands-on experience in the industrial arts or home economics labs or wherever the program is

appropriate. Over that four-year period, six to nine weeks at a time, the student will have the opportunity to experience a very wide range of careers. An example of how a teacher could use one project to stimulate thinking about careers in a class is the building of a bridge. The class might make an on-site visit to a bridge under construction. In a laboratory situation, they might mix some mortar, pound some nails, and experience some of the physical labor of construction. That is an experience-rich kind of curriculum planning. Then they can be encouraged to ask and answer some of the following questions:

- Who planned the bridge and why? (We tend to underplay local and state government in our "civics" and social science education. Young people might know about the Incas or the Eskimos, but they probably don't know about their own city's planning commission, so here is an opportunity to teach them something about government.)
- Who paid for the bridge? (Again, here is an opportunity to teach about government. What are some of the many jobs involved in taxation and revenue-collecting?)
- What are some sociological implications of the bridge? Were any people displaced from their homes to make room for the bridge? What about freeways leading up to the bridge, dividing a community? What are some of the implications of using a gasoline credit card to drive down a bond-financed freeway in a bank-financed car?
- What are some of the other disciplines and jobs involved in planning, financing, and building a bridge? Architects, attorneys, engineers, assessors, stenographers, draftsmen, construction trades, etc.?

These are illustrations suggesting the value of career education. Bringing into the classroom in a practical way the real-life world of work and all that it involves can give the whole curriculum a vitality that is now often lacking.

American education has discriminated against the young person who doesn't think well in the abstract. Schools do fairly well with the student who can think conceptually, but an impressive majority of students are not conceptual thinkers. At least two-thirds of the elementary and secondary students do not think well in the abstract. For those students, it is necessary to begin with the concrete and then move to the abstract--sometimes literally (as in the bridge-building example). Career education provides such a methodology.

Career education changes schooling in that learning becomes experiential. Even mathematics and science can be seen as significant experiences in daily life not confined to narrow subject matter disciplines. In fact, career education bridges the different areas of study. (The bridge-building example can include art and esthetics, humanities, sociology, politics, and ethics, as well as the obvious mathematics, science, and construction work.) This is particularly important because the major issues in our society are larger than subject matter disciplines. We must begin to take a multi-interdisciplinary approach to the discussion of these kinds of problems.

Is there any hope for the typical college preparatory high school curriculum? Within two or three years all the students in Oregon high schools will be enrolled in some type of career cluster program, and they

will be required to demonstrate competency in order to graduate. (A career cluster is a family of occupations sharing similar skills.) For the students who want to enter into the professions requiring higher education, the typical college preparatory program will continue to be adequate.

Other students can choose other options; the beautiful thing about a good career education program is that it does provide options for all students, not just for the college-bound as in traditional high schools. Rather than leaving high school as a trained auto mechanic, a student studying mechanics would have wide experiences in areas like internal combustion machines, braking systems, hydraulic systems, and electrical systems. With that broad experience, he or she could go to work in some jobs that don't require sophisticated entry skills; but that is not the primary purpose of secondary school career education. Specific job training and intensive job training will be left largely for the post-high school experience. High school students must not be locked into specific and limiting jobs. The beauty of the career cluster approach in high school is that the student may move in many related directions.

Career education is a way to learn--a vehicle for action. Today many students find that the schooling experience is not very real to them. Consequently, they can't wait to get out of school and begin doing "real" things. Career education brings schooling and real-life experiences together. How often have students asked teachers, "Why do I need to study this?" We must be able to give a better answer than simply, "I hope you are going to need it some day." This is where career education gives educators a grand opportunity to convince students of the relevance of their schooling experiences.

Incidentally, but not unimportantly, career education will also help make young people confident that they can cope with life. This helps provide for part of the need for security and the need for self-esteem, returning for a moment to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If there is anything young people need today it is the skills which persuade them that they can cope with whatever life throws at them. Experiential learning develops competence and confidence. This makes us all feel better about ourselves and less likely to disparage those about us. And all this, in turn, will help to return the smiles to the faces of men and women and young people engaged in teaching and learning. Bringing reality into the classroom by using career education as a vehicle for developing competent wage earners and producers will introduce new purpose and vigor into the modern curriculum.

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